

# CALIFORNIA

## OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

### FASHION DESIGNERS

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INTEREST AREA  
ARTISTIC



### WHAT DOES A FASHION DESIGNER DO?

FASHION DESIGNERS create clothing and accessory designs. They may plan the production and marketing of their creations. Designers specialize in one type of garment or accessory such as men's or women's wear, children's garments, swimwear, lingerie, handbags, or shoes. Some high-fashion Designers are self-employed and design for individual clients. They make fashion news by establishing the silhouette, colors, and kinds of materials that will be worn each season. Other self-employed, high-fashion Designers cater to specialty stores or high-fashion department stores. They design original garments as well as follow the established fashion trends. Designers who work for apparel manufacturers do less original work; they adapt fashions set by other Designers for the mass market.

Designers' Assistants in apparel manufacturing are exposed to the fast pace of production schedules while performing routine aspects of the job. Assistant Designers acquire the knowledge of what creations will sell at a profit in an intended market, within a defined price range, at a particular time of the year. They learn the personality of firms, types of stores that buy the merchandise, and the age and tastes of the stores' clientele.

Fashion Designers perform the following tasks:

- Sketch their ideas.
- Draw and cut patterns to create sample garments.
- Select fabric and trimmings.
- Combine basic dressmaking and tailoring principles with flat pattern work and draping techniques.
- Fit and modify the finished garment.
- Arrange showings for press and buyers when the sample garment line is ready.
- Compare merchandise with those of the competitors.
- Keep current on trends by reading trade magazines and attending fashion shows.
- Visit textile showrooms to keep up to date on latest fabrics.

A large manufacturer generally has a Head Designer and several assistants. Many small firms do not employ Designers but purchase ready-made designs or copy higher-priced designs.

#### *Head Designers*

Head Designers are responsible for executive and creative functions. They supervise design room staff. Those with less experience may be responsible for small divisions or specialized garments.

### ***Assistant Designers***

Assistant Designers are generally all-around assistants to Designers. They make first patterns and samples or may supervise sample makers.

### ***Specialty Designers***

Specialty Designers work with other Designers to coordinate special lines of clothing, such as sweaters. They often arrange for styles to be made in foreign countries.

### ***Theatrical Costume Designers***

Theatrical Costume Designers create costumes for movies or theatrical productions, usually on a contract basis.

## **WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?**

Fashion Designers frequently use the following skills, knowledge, and abilities:

- **Design** – Knowledge of design techniques, principles, tools and instruments involved in the production and use of precision technical plans, blueprints, drawings, and models.
- **Idea Generation** – Generating a number of different approaches to problems.
- **Active Learning** – Working with new material or information to grasp its implications.
- **Operations Analysis** – Analyzing needs and product requirements to create a design.
- **Originality** – The ability to come up with unusual or clever ideas about a given topic or situation, or to develop creative ways to solve a problem.
- **Visioning** – Developing an image of how a system should work under ideal conditions.
- **Coordination** – Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.

## **WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?**

The work environment for Designers varies. Some Designers work in quiet, spacious, well-lit, and well-ventilated areas. Others may work in small

areas close to crowded workrooms. Designers work independently but spend much of their time coordinating their work with workroom personnel, buyers, sales personnel, firm members, patrons, and other artists. Designers may travel out of the country for showings, conferences, or shopping. They may work under pressure for long periods to meet deadlines and budget limitations. Many Designers are busy all year preparing styles for the following seasons. Others work intermittently and are laid off when a line is completed.

### ***Union Membership***

There are a number of professional organizations that Fashion Designers can join, such as Fashion Group International of Los Angeles, Inc. and the Costume Council, but there is, as of yet, little or no unionization of this occupation.

## **WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?**

The following information is from the occupational projections produced by the Employment Development Department's Labor Market Information Division:

Estimated number of workers in 1998:	22,800
Estimated number of workers in 2008:	31,100
Projected Growth 1998-2008:	36.4%
Est. openings due to separations by 2008:	3,900
<i>These figures do not include self-employment.</i>	

The figures represent the broad occupational group, Designers, Except Interior Designers, which includes Fashion Designers. Occupations in all areas of the design field are expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2008. The estimated number of job opportunities from 1998 through 2008 is expected to total 12,200. Despite the above average growth, applicants can expect keen competition for jobs as Fashion Design appeals to many.

### ***Trends***

Demand for Fashion Designers should remain strong, as consumers hungry for new fashions and apparel styles will spur the creation of new clothing and accessories.

## WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?

### California Earnings

#### Fashion Designers 2001 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$20.95 to \$30.27
Average hourly wage	\$27.73
Average annual wage	\$57,678

Source: Occupational Employment Survey of Employers by EDD/LMID.

Earnings of Fashion Designers depend on ability, the size of the employing firm, and the kind of fashion designing involved. Well-trained applicants often begin as Design Room Assistants, an entry-level position that can lead to more responsible jobs in the fashion industry or they can enter the field as Assistant Designers. Highly skilled and well-known Designers may earn well over \$100,000 annually. Incomes of self-employed and freelance Designers vary with their talent, business ability, reputation, and type of clientele. They may be guaranteed a percentage of the gross, or be paid on a unit or retainer basis. Such earnings can exceed those of salaried Designers.

### Hours

Designers work a 40-hour week but may work considerable overtime during rush periods.

### Benefits

Benefits vary with employers. Designers often negotiate their salaries and benefits individually with employers. Some firms provide vacation and group health insurance plans.

## HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?

### Education and Training

Artistic talent is crucial in fashion design. People in this field need a good sense of line, color, form, a sense of balance and proportion, and an eye for detail. The work requires initiative, resolve, and the ability to organize. A portfolio of a Designer's best work is sometimes more influential in finding a job than an extensive education. Formal training, however, is important for most Designers.

Graduation from a school or college that provides specialized training in fashion designing is recommended. In California, students may obtain a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in art and specialization in costume design at accredited colleges or universities.

Vocational schools offer two-year programs in the fundamentals of fashion design. Students in these schools may earn certificates or an Associate of Arts degree in the field. Some industry leaders feel that community colleges and vocational training schools provide better preparation than four-year institutions because they are more closely allied with the garment industry.

Typically, vocational schools offer a two-tiered certificate program complementary to the Associate of Arts degree. A first-level certificate of proficiency is usually offered to those who want to enter the field quickly. This short certificate will prepare individuals to work as Design Room Assistants. These Assistants work in a design room where they have an opportunity to perform a variety of general functions. Common duties may include spec writing, cataloging fabrics and trims, and the updating of sample boards.

The second-level certificate of proficiency takes more time to complete, but upon completion applicants are more competitive for Assistant Designer positions. Assistant Designers often produce flat drawings of garments with detailed specifications for production. Knowledge of apparel construction and pattern is essential. Assistant Designers may be asked to create theme boards or fabric boards. They need the ability to work with color and design. Assistant Designers may also order fabric and trims and must have a solid understanding of fabric construction and behavior. Because they will be called on to do many jobs around the design room, they must be flexible and responsible. They need to be able to work as a member of a team as well as independently.

Courses in vocational schools usually include sketching, pattern making, draping and grading, garment construction, textiles and trimmings, costume history, principles of design and color; and how to plan, price, and promote seasonal lines. High school students interested in fashion

design should take courses in sewing, art, mathematics, business, speech, and English.

### ***Licensing and Certification***

There are currently no licensing and certification requirements for Fashion Designers in California.

### ***Continuing Education***

A first level certificate from a vocational school can gain the job seeker entry into the fashion industry. Fashion industry employees may return to school to earn a second-level certificate or an Associate of Arts degree or attend a fine arts school to learn drawing or design on a more artistic level. The learning process often continues on the job rather than in the classroom.

## **HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?**

Future Fashion Designers may find jobs through their training facility job placement offices. Experienced Designers locate jobs through other people in the industry, professional affiliations, or advertisements in trade journals or newspapers.

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Private firms are listed in the yellow pages under dressmaking firms, manufacturers, custom dress shops, design studios, department stores, and pattern houses. California job openings can be found at various online job-listing systems including CalJOBS<sup>SM</sup> at [www.caljobs.ca.gov](http://www.caljobs.ca.gov) or at America's Job Bank at [www.ajb.dni.us](http://www.ajb.dni.us).

For other occupational and wage information and a listing of the largest employers in any county, visit the Employment Development Department Labor Market Information Web page at [www.calmis.ca.gov](http://www.calmis.ca.gov). Find further job search assistance from your nearest Job Service office [www.edd.ca.gov/jsloc.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/jsloc.htm) or the closest One-Stop site listed on the California WorkNet site, [www.sjtcc.ca.gov/sjtccweb/one-stop](http://www.sjtcc.ca.gov/sjtccweb/one-stop).

## **WHERE CAN THIS JOB LEAD?**

Beginning Designers often start as Assistant Designers, as trainees in design departments, or as pattern makers, pattern graders, or sketchers. Those who prove their ability are usually promoted to Designer status within two to four years. Promotion for most Designers is reflected in a salary increase or in a work assignment that involves greater responsibility. Others may become self-employed.

## **OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

California Fashion Association (CFA)  
515 South Flower Street, 32<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90071  
(213) 688-6288  
[www.californiafashionassociation.org](http://www.californiafashionassociation.org)

Costume Designers Guild (CDG)  
4730 Woodman Avenue, Suite 430  
Sherman Oaks, CA 91423  
(818) 905-1557  
[www.costumedesignersguild.com](http://www.costumedesignersguild.com)

Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA)  
1412 Broadway, Suite 2006  
New York, NY 10018  
(212) 302-1821

International Association of Clothing Designers (IACD)  
34 Thorton Ferry Road #1  
Amherst, NH 03031  
(603) 672-4065  
Fax: (603) 672-4064  
[www.iacde.com/english/index.htm](http://www.iacde.com/english/index.htm)

Employment Projections by Occupation  
[www.calmis.ca.gov/htmlfile/subject/occproj.htm](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/htmlfile/subject/occproj.htm)

Employment and Wages by Occupation  
[www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup\\$/OES\\$.htm](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup$/OES$.htm)

## **RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES**

Buyers (Retail Trade)	No. 118
Models	No. 144
Interior Designers	No. 189

## OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES

**SOC** (*Standard Industrial Classification*)

Fashion Designers 27-1022

**O\*NET** (*Occupational Information Network*)

Fashion Designers 27-1022.00

**OES** (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)

Designers, Except Interior Designers 34038

**DOT** (*Dictionary of Occupational Titles*)

Fashion Designers 142.061-018